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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000752

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2019
TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [SY](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: [TURKEY](#):NO NEW AGREEMENT ON EUPHRATES OR TIGRIS
WATER FLOW

REF: A. ANKARA 687
[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 384

Classified By: Economic Counselor Dale Eppler for reasons 1.4 b, d

[1](#)1. (C) We met May 27 with MFA Regional and Transboundary Waters Department Head Sibel Algan and Altay Altinors, a hydrological engineer working as an advisor to Algan's office. Algan said that, contrary to press reports, Foreign Minister Davutoglu did not agree to an increase in downstream water flow on the Euphrates during his recent visit to Baghdad. Rather, Davutoglu announced that Turkey was increasing Euphrates water flow back to 500 cubic meters/second, the amount of water Turkey agreed to send downstream to Syria in a 1987 joint economic commission article. Altinors explained that Euphrates water flow had dropped below that level (to an average 400 cm/second) after three years of drought conditions left Turkish reservoirs too low to continue releases at the agreed level.

[1](#)2. (C) Algan said that Turkey believes the 1987 agreement with Syria was a mistake, in that it specifies a quantity of water to flow downstream regardless of supply conditions in Turkey. "Turkey will not do a similar agreement again." Instead, Turkey wants to manage both the Tigris and Euphrates river basins on a whole watershed basis, jointly managing supply and demand with other riparian countries (see Ref A). However, neither Iraq nor Syria has expressed any interest in such an approach. Algan said Iraq in particular has been demanding increased water flow from Turkey and Syria whenever water issues are discussed. Syria has a bilateral agreement with Iraq under which it agrees to let 58% of Turkish Euphrates water flow into Syria pass thru to Iraq.

[1](#)3. (C) Altinors noted that Iraqi demands for more water via the Euphrates come despite its receipt of 50 billion cubic meters/year of water from the Tigris, on which Turkey currently has no major dam (though it is trying to construct the controversial Ilusu dam on it). According to Algan, the Iraqis do not want to engage in any discussion of joint management of the Tigris, either bilaterally with Turkey or trilaterally with Turkey, Iraq and Iran. He noted that Turkey provides only 50% of Tigris water flow, with the rest coming from Iraq and Iran.

[1](#)4. (C) Algan said Iran also indicated it was not interested in trilateral Tigris water management discussions, preferring to address water issues on a bilateral basis. She noted that most Turkish-Iranian water issues are covered by "very ancient agreements" between municipalities on both sides of several small transboundary rivers and are dealt with at the municipal level. The exception is the Aras river, which flows from Turkey and Georgia into Armenia and Azerbaijan before reaching Iran. The Aras is heavily polluted by Georgian and Armenian industrial waste but even here, Algan said, the Iranians have indicated they want to stick to

bilateral discussions.

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